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ABSTRACT

The National Network of Women's Caucuses first biennial meeting saw over 50 participants come together to discuss a broad range of issues affecting women in the disciplines and professions. One set of discussions included panelists Dorothy O. Helly, Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich, Sandra Coyner, Leslie Hill-Davidson, and Betty Schmitz. The discussion addressed three themes: (1) Where is feminist theory today on the central issues of essentialism versus social construction and equality versus difference?; (2) How has post-structuralism affected these debates?; and (3) How do issues of experience versus expertise get played out in these theories? Other questions considered were: (1) What has been learned about the stages necessary for transforming the knowledge base?; (2) What is known about the kinds of changes this transformation entails?; (3) What has been to learned about the intersection of race, ethnicity, and class with gender? (4) To what extent are researchers talking to themselves?; (5) Has the feminist challenge to the knowledge base been ignored in the continued production of knowledge?; and (5) How can positioning for backlash take place? (KM)

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TRANSFORMING THE KNOWLEDGE BASE

A Panel Discussion
at the
National Network of Women's Caucuses
First Biennial Meeting, 1989

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Preface

Women's caucuses and committees in the professional associations and learned societies have played a strategic role in advancing women in higher education in this country over the last two decades. At least 50 such groups formed between 1968 and 1971. Today there are over 170. They have functioned within and outside of their disciplines and associations to improve the status of women and to encourage scholarly research on women. These groups have been instrumental in promoting research and data collecting on women in the professions; in establishing the fields of women's studies and gender studies; and in gaining legitimacy for feminist theories and research findings within the disciplines. They are also increasingly playing key roles in bringing about coordinated change on campuses--especially substantive curriculum transformation.

In June 1988, the National Council for Research on Women sponsored a two-day planning meeting at the Spring Hill Center in Wayzata, Minnesota for 25 representatives of committees, caucuses, networks, and organizations within or affiliated with the academic disciplines and professional associations in the United States.

The June 1988 meeting concluded by organizing itself formally as the National Network of Women's Caucuses and Committees in the Professional Associations, or NNWC as it has come to be known (National Network of Women's Caucuses). In a final resolution, the meeting resolved to:

> *Establish a coalition of women's caucuses, committees, commissions, and other groups in the disciplines and professional associations that will*
>
> *o advance the status of women in the professions;*
>
> *o map the exponential growth of feminist research and scholarship in and across the disciplinary and professional fields and;*
>
> *o link feminist research to international, national, regional, and local policy issues*

Administered as an official project of the National Council for Research on Women, the NNWC includes members from the professional associations, learned societies, education associations, faculty associations, women's studies associations, and other discipline-based women's groups.

The first national biennial NNWC meeting, held in Washington, DC February 24-26, 1989, provided an opportunity for caucus representatives to carry on "the spirit of Spring Hill." Over 50 participants came together to discuss a broad range of issues affecting women in the disciplines and professions.

It gives us enormous pleasure to publish a version of one of the featured panels at that meeting. Committed to grappling with the difficulties of theorizing and understanding each other across disciplines, the *Transforming the Knowledge Base* panel captured the imagination and enthusiasm of those present in ways we hope translate into print. There was a palpable sense of making history in the room as we concluded our discussions, and we publish the presentation in the hopes of continuing and clarifying that dialogue.

The NNWC would not be possible without the work of a thorough and committed Council staff. Thanks to Debra L. Schultz for her energy and support in helping to organize the coalition, to Mariam K. Chamberlain for her early wisdom and funding support as a program officer at the Ford Foundation and continued support and leadership as the Founding President of the Council. Thanks also to Louise te Boekhorst and Paulette Tulloch for their gracious and efficient administrative coordination. Finally, special thanks to Susan A. Hallgarth for her fine ear and skill in editing this event into a readable, accessible print resource.

Mary Ellen S. Capek
Executive Director
New York City, May 1990

TRANSFORMING THE KNOWLEDGE BASE

A Panel Discussion
at the
National Network of Women's Caucuses
First Biennial Meeting, 1989

Panelists

Dorothy O. Helly, Panel Chair
Coordinating Committee on Women
in the Historical Profession

Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich
Society for the Study of Women Philosophers,
American Philosophical Association

Sandra Coyner
Feminist Scholarship Task Force,
National Women's Studies Association

Leslie Hill-Davidson
Women's Studies Program
Hunter College

Betty Schmitz
University of Maryland

Introduction

Dorothy O. Helly:

I would like to introduce our panelists and then discuss how we are going to present to you some thoughts on Transforming the Knowledge Base.

Sandra Coyner, like myself, is an historian by training, but now she describes herself as a women's studies person. Today she is representing the Feminist Scholarship Task Force of the National Women's Studies Association. For the past decade, she has been the Director of Women's Studies at Kansas State University, where she teaches courses on the introduction to, methodologies in, and theories about women's studies. She writes about the ideas and the institutions of women's studies, and she is in the process of writing a book based on her important early article on women studies ["Women's Studies as an Academic Discipline: Why and How to Do It." In *Theories of Women's Studies*, published by Routledge & Kegan Paul in 1983].

Leslie Hill-Davidson is a political scientist, with a specialty in comparative politics of developing areas. Her research interest is women's political behavior in developing countries. She is currently in the Women's Studies Program at Hunter College, where she is teaching a course on Black Women in the Americas. [In 1989, Leslie moved to Bates College, Maine, where she is an Instructor of Political Science.]

Elizabeth Minnich, whose field is philosophy, has had more than fifteen years of intellectual and strategic work in curricular transformation. Her book, called *Transforming Knowledge*, is forthcoming [published by Temple University Press in April 1990]. She is also finishing a book with Peggy McIntosh about how women's studies has affected the disciplines.

Betty Schmitz is Assistant to the President at the University of Maryland. She has been working on curricular transformation since 1979 at Montana State University, Lewis and Clark College in Oregon, and the University of Washington. Last year her fairy godmother waved a wand, gave her a pot of gold, and told her to "go do her thing" in Maryland.

Our plan is to talk among ourselves for half of our time, then open the subject for general discussion. The overview for our discussion, set out by our philosopher Elizabeth Minnich, is that we are working simultaneously on a number of levels. On one level, we will be talking about these issues among ourselves and on another level, about the world in which we are dealing with these issues. Similarly, we will be talking about theory in feminist scholarship and about teaching feminist scholarship. And in the same way, we will be talking about the theory of doing curricular work and about doing curricular work.

Our three themes are: 1) Where is feminist theory today on the central issues of essentialism *versus* social construction and equality *versus* difference? 2) How has post-structuralism affected these debates? And finally, 3) How do issues of experience *versus* expertise get played out in these theories?

Before you collapse under the weight of these questions, we should let you know that we also want to talk about several other questions: What have we learned about the stages necessary for transforming the knowledge base? What do we know about the kinds of changes this transformation entails? What have we begun to learn about the intersection of race, ethnicity, and class with gender? And to what extent are we talking to ourselves? Has the feminist challenge to the knowledge base been ignored in the continued production of knowledge? How do we position ourselves for backlash?

Elizabeth Minnich will begin with a few thoughts: "Where is feminist theory today on the central issues of essentialism *versus* social construction, equality *versus* difference?"

Panel Presentations

Elizabeth Minnich:

How to get at this huge topic is stymieing, so I will oversimplify. On one level, what we are dealing with is a continuing and (we will start by saying) human effort to think well and clearly about sameness and difference, about individuality and universality, about constancy and change. In other words, about the perennial, classic philosophical problems, about "the one and the many." Every time I read contemporary theory, I find myself thinking, oh, we're talking about "the one and the many" again. And change and essence.

These familiar issues are surfacing again in our discourse. There is continuity from the very beginning of the hegemonic, dominant tradition to what we are trying to do today. At the same time, there are moments of radical disruption. So what we want to do is to watch the interchange between the continuities and the radical disruptions--the radical disruptions being, of course, what we are trying fundamentally to bring about.

Having said that, let me add that the problems are also very much the same. My shorthand way of characterizing what happened way back at the beginning of the dominant tradition--which we are now, once again, trying to transform--is to say that there is a root problem at the base of the hegemonic tradition, the male Greco-Euro-American tradition. The root

problem is that at the very beginning of that tradition, a few, privileged males--slave holders with women at home supervising, women who were also themselves slaves or workers--those very few men, who are usually called "the Greeks," defined themselves as "the inclusive term," "the norm," and "the Ideal."

They had these philosophical questions for themselves: How can you know anything if everything changes? How can you have any kind of control if your knowledge is not certain (a relation of knowledge and certainty)? How do we deal with apparent opposites that make control difficult? What they ended up with is precisely what we are still trying to undo, something I have come to call rather fondly--because I like its initials and because the language is so gross it amuses me--Hierarchically Invidious Monism (HIM).

The point is that these very few, privileged males came up with a system in which there is one kind of human being who is "the inclusive term," "the norm," and "the Ideal." Everything else not "Man" is not an equal opposite. Woman is not an equal opposite. The barbarians--all other men--are not equal opposites. Everything else is less. Everything else moves down a sliding scale to non-being. That's monism, not dualism.

Given that kind of structure, when we started trying to think-about women, we had what seemed like only two options. One was to think of ourselves as the same, thinking we meant equal--which is, of course, a contradiction in terms. The other was to think of ourselves as Different with a capital D, in which case, by the prevailing meaning-system, we were less, marginal, weird. So we had to do some revaluing, and we had to try to fight for Difference, fight for dualism, for heaven's sake.

We also fell into the kind of thinking traps that go with working in a dominant tradition that is as skewed as this one. Which is to say that various groups of women at different times have defined themselves as Woman. Fighting for dualism, we ended up with capital M Man, capital W Woman. And Woman was often falsely universalized in a HIM system, just as Man had been.

So we got a certain kind of woman--usually Euro-American, heterosexual, and privileged--as Woman. And Woman became "the inclusive term," "the norm" and "the Ideal," but now in a dualism. That, too, does not help with thinking about difference, even if a dualism is better than a monism. So at the beginning, because of the structure--both the political and the intellectual structure--we had this: we have to be the same or different in order to be equal.

It seems to me that part of what is happening today is that feminist scholarship has been working away from the crudeness of this same-or-different formulation and has been making various kinds of alliances with all

the new "-isms" (post-modernism, post-structuralism, deconstructionism) in order to move from what is now called "essentialism" to "social construction" (or any other label that you want). The effort of all of the new -isms is in various ways to be able to talk about difference without having to talk about opposition, to be able to talk about differences intimately inter-related all the time with sameness. That's complex. We'll just leave it there for a moment.

It seems to me that among the problems with these prevailing new theories--with feminist scholarship and the new alliances with all the -isms--is that Woman keeps reappearing with a capital W. Now it is happening because we disrupt the system. Before it was because we did not fit into the system. And the very thing that kept us from fitting into the system is now being claimed as making us wonderful: Woman is Other and that is good. We can deconstruct using Woman precisely because she cannot be spoken in the meaning-system. But there is Woman again with a capital W, often built in terms of body, just exactly the way we were defined before, only now we are doing it ourselves.

Hierarchical monisms--HIMS, if you like--have a characteristic of being easily irreversible, I will suggest. And I am not sure we then have done as much as we wish to have done. There's a lot more to be said about that. I do not mean to dismiss all these new theories and alliances, but I will say that there are powerful new allies for feminist scholarship. On the other hand, it is far from automatic that any schools of thought *not* fundamentally feminist--in a way that is not *itself* faultily universalized--*can* be revolutionary. So my guess is that we are watching a palace coup in academia and not a revolution.

Beyond that--so as not to end with nothing but a sort of "Oh, there they go again"--one of the things I find exciting is that feminist scholarship is also making alliances in different ways with multicultural scholarship, with all of the different multicultural scholarships: with environmental studies, ecology, peace studies, lesbian and gay studies, nuclear studies, with all of the special studies that have been around the perimeter of this central curriculum and which in fact make almost exactly the same fundamental critique.

They are on the periphery for the same reasons intellectually, politically, and culturally. When we start working with these people, their topics make up a list of the most pressing human concerns of our times. And again, we have both sameness and difference. Theirs is very much the same critique worked through in different contexts, so there is an extraordinarily rich coordination.

My suggestion, in order to avoid just a palace coup and to avoid flipping from essence to construct and back again--the one and the many and back again--is that we watch ourselves and make alliances with these other special programs. We make up the vast majority of human kind--as you know, we are not the minority; privileged white males are the minority--and

our alliance with these other special programs will allow us to take advantage of some very sophisticated thinking that has been going on for at least twenty years in many of these other areas as well as in women's studies.

Dorothy O. Helly:

I will now ask Sandy Coyner to comment on what we have learned about the stages necessary for transforming the knowledge base, and what we know about the kind of changes this transformation entails.

Sandra Coyner:

Some of you may be familiar with articles that suggest there are "stages" in the transformation of knowledge about women and gender. These stages are often described as developmental stages--that we learn one set of ideas about gender, then progress to another stage and still another stage. There are several models, but most of them suggest: 1) that we start from some sort of patriarchal knowledge where no women are discussed; 2) then we add a few women, especially women who acted mostly like men; 3) we may then have a stage where we focus on women without studying men; 4) then somehow we finally get to an "ultimate" stage, where we study men and women together.

Some of the authors of these stage theories are concerned that the stages may be used hierarchically, models that suggest one form of knowledge is better than another form of knowledge. In one article, the stage model was actually used as a way to evaluate how much a particular course or curriculum had been transformed as it moved to one of the "higher" stages. I have always been concerned about this kind of thinking. Given my druthers, I would not want to be in a "top" stage, which in my view is *not* the same as the "highest form of knowledge." But I also do not like the notion that we are all somehow on the "same track." I think what has happened is confusion between a developmental stage and an historical stage and perhaps confusion between developmental stages and pedagogical structures.

While it is valuable to organize the knowledge we are trying to teach our colleagues in ways that they can learn it--in other words, in steps which they may perceive as progressive steps--those pedagogical schema are not necessarily developmental stages in which we leave one stage and move to another. This sequence does have some truth as a description of what we have done as we modified our knowledge in the last fifteen or twenty years. But I think it is a terrible mistake for us to assume that the stages in which we developed knowledge in the context of the 1970s are necessarily the same stages and in the same order in which others are going to learn about women and gender in the 1990s in very different contexts.

As long as we are trying to educate our colleagues who may be about

the same age as we are, the stages may have some relevance. But I am concerned about our students now, about the young women who are going to be our replacements, who are going to take on this challenge. I came to women's studies through the women's movement and such ideas as "the personal is political," there is sexism, there is patriarchy, and there is women's solidarity. Now I meet students coming to women's studies through deconstruction. They start in a very different world. And it is possible that one reason they do not always listen to us is that they perceive us as making them go back and learn it the way we learned it, when we ought to be able to understand and teach in ways that are appropriate to them, in the contexts in which they, in fact, have lived.

I would like to add another concept: to think of "stages" not as developmental but as theatrical stages, as the places on which we stand while we make our presentations. It is a notion I am finding extremely important: thinking about the stage on which we do the feminist transformation of knowledge, the place on which we stand. It is a space that we make by placing ourselves on top of or inside of--whatever the location--that we make by the tension of holding together seemingly irreconcilable opposites.

It is not a matter of choosing among things that look like they are irreconcilable, not a matter of prioritizing or privileging one of these elements against another, of "hierarchizing" them. What we are trying to do is to bring them together. We are trying to create a space defined as a relationship, defined as a holding together, rather than defining our space by excluding some elements because we are privileging one or two.

If that is too abstract, I have a few examples. This is something that should be familiar to us. We have been doing it for a long time. For example, we were told that we could have either a family or a career. We said, no, we are going to hold them together, in tension--of course they are in tension given the values that shape most of the institutions we work in--but we are going to hold them together and make a space, and that space is where we are going to stand.

Or, to get more trivial, we were asked, well, what are you going to do to dress for success? You can't go and dress like a man, or you look odd, like you are trying to be something you are not. You can't go and dress feminine, or you will be trivialized. So what do we do? We have to create a space. We have to create an identity for ourselves by holding together things that are seemingly driving apart from each other, like the universe after the big bang, I suppose. We have to create a space, and that is where we live.

Or scholarship in activism. We were told, you can't. Your scholarship has to be separate from activism. And indeed, activists often say our activism has to be separate from scholarship. We say, absolutely not. We are going to hold them together. We are going to make a relationship.

We are going to make that relationship a central element of what we are doing.

In the caucuses, we are told, you have to worry about the status of women in the profession or you have to develop new knowledge about women and gender. No, we are going to hold those things together and do them simultaneously. All of this has a lot to do with the idea of equality *versus* difference, which we may want to talk about a little more. We do not want to choose. We are going to hold them together.

I think when we look at what has happened to our knowledge about women and gender over the past fifteen years, the things we are trying to hold together are both knowledge about the gender system and knowledge about women's experience. "Gender system" I use to encompass all that we know about images of women, about socialization into gender, about discrimination, about economics, family, poverty, violence, and about the social construction of gender. On the other hand, "women's experiences" are now a wealth of knowledge we've accumulated about how women have experienced the world--how women view the world, women's values, women's morality, women's ways of knowing. And we are defining these not comparatively with men but from women's central standpoints--mothering, women's creativity, recovering lost women writers, recovering lost women mathematicians.

And I can see how that knowledge has developed in relationship, how these two themes--knowledge about the gender system and knowledge about women's experience--have created tension against each other. For example, I am struck by how the scholarship on women in literature has emerged: from the late 1960s, the talking about images of women; then in the 1970s, much, much work on women writers; and now in the late 1980s, more theoretical work on how gender is socially constructed in text. I see that as a shift from a gender-system focus (what are the images of women), to a women's experience focus, to a gender-system focus--always enriched by what we have learned, always trying to hold it together.

In the discipline of history, I see a move from an early interest in how women have been oppressed through time, to a concern for the world women created for themselves in many places (and a displeasure with the notion that women are always victims of oppression, and an attempt to see the ways in which women created their own world), and now to a critique of the error of looking at women's own world without seeing the patriarchal contexts in which women did that work.

So the stages on which we stand to do this transformation work involve also the work that we do. We now know that we must *both* transform the existing traditional disciplines to include knowledge about women and gender, and we must establish securely a new discipline of women's studies

that focuses precisely on women's experience and on issues of gender. We cannot do just one without the other. Both of those are part of our work. And in order to do the discipline of women's studies, we must have *both* what we have come to call the interdisciplinary program (in which feminist scholars who are grounded in the disciplines, who have homes in the disciplines, come together to work together on this new knowledge about women) and we must have scholars who work and who have their home in women studies, who, like me, are charged with developing and teaching the shared core and making it clear and visible.

What that means is that for our young women, our students now, we must have graduate programs in women's studies. It is not, I think, fair to say, well, we started in a discipline. We learned about women in our disciplines. We then were able to expand and learn about other disciplines, and you must too. Because they are saying, many of them, I don't want to; I want to start in the discipline of women studies. We will lose our credibility if we say you must go through these stages the way we did. Young women need the stages that are right for them in their moment in history.

Dorothy O. Helly:

Leslie Hill Davidson is now going to take up the second theme again--what have we learned about the stages necessary for transforming the knowledge base--but she will shift it around to look at what we have begun to learn about the intersections of race, ethnicity, and class with gender.

Leslie Hill-Davidson:

Just as the other panelists have, I too have been given about two minutes to share with you a couple of pithy sentences. I do not know how much "pith" I've got, but I'll take my long sentences and try to squeeze them into my few minutes. When I turned this question over and over in my head, I came up with a few observations--certainly limited in terms of the observations that can be made about the intersection of race, ethnicity, and class with gender--and then asked myself, what are some of the implications of those observations.

My first observation is that the manifestation of gender oppression is almost always mediated by the impact of racial, ethnic, and class exploitation and that the impact of other systems of oppressions sometimes supersedes the impact of gender oppression. My second observation, however, holds that the experiences of multiple oppressions, as Deborah King argues, are not merely additive but interactive. They are interactive and compounded in women's lives, and multiple oppressions are parallel in ways that contrast with the ways in which their impact is contradictory. Third, the salience of gender oppression is dependent upon the socio-historical context and social

phenomenon being considered. That is, gender oppression is often muted by manifestations of other systems of oppression. My fourth observation is that through other systems of oppression, some women can and do exploit other women.

What are the implications of these things for transforming a knowledge base that already exists, a knowledge base that women's studies has been critiquing for some time? I would simply offer to you, first, that the knowledge base that needs to be constructed will be differently constructed as well as different in content. Instead of a single, privileged, ethnocentric, hierarchical, male-centered knowledge base, I believe that the transformation implies a knowledge base that assumes the existence, the salience, the importance of the Other. A knowledge base that is not only alternative but different and diverse. Perhaps one without a single center. One that is certainly non-hierarchal, that begins with and is focused on that which is marginal.

I think that some of these observations might also imply that our ways of knowing and of constructing knowledge will then entail methodological and epistemological work that seeks to incorporate the Other. Thus, the process of constructing this different knowledge base challenges our currently legitimized ways of knowing. As Audre Lorde says, "the master's tools cannot be used to dismantle the master's house." For example, knowledge gained through expertise will almost always never be enough. Experiential knowledge must also include the experience and knowledge of those who do not customarily do intellectual work but do work that is essential.

I also believe that a different knowledge base and its construction means that, while we focus on systems of oppression, we must focus on the behavior of those who live with the consequences, of those who resist, of those who are not defined by their victimization but by their individual and collective visions of what a different world might look like.

And finally, I would suggest that those doing the transformation work must be aware that while it focuses on a base of knowledge, it undoubtedly challenges a set of power relations that are embedded in and reach far beyond the academy. And we must be aware that it is dangerous work to those of us who do it. It is dangerous to us because it means that we constantly challenge our own hierarchies, our own assumptions, and our own acceptance of ways of knowing and of what knowledge *is*--in fact, we have to challenge ourselves constantly. This is dangerous to those who insist on defending a current knowledge base, a knowledge base that is at least inadequate if not part of the apparatus of oppression.

Dorothy O. Helly:

Now Betty Schmitz will take over to talk about to what extent we are talking to ourselves. Has the feminist challenge to the knowledge base been ignored in the continued production of knowledge? And how do we position ourselves for the backlash?

Betty Schmitz:

Are we talking to ourselves? I think it depends on the choice we make as to where to do the work. Right now, because of the position I am in at the University of Maryland, where I have been hired to do curricular transformation, I see us having a tremendous impact. However, I think it is also important that we maintain those spaces within institutions where we *can* talk to ourselves. I realize I am reiterating the somewhat painful argument we had several years ago about women's studies' autonomy *versus* integration, but we will not be able to respond to the general challenge for setting the terms of the debate if we do not preserve those spaces.

I see curriculum-transformation work as our public relations effort in the academy. It is also our primary strategy for making sure that we are not talking to ourselves. There has been phenomenal growth in curricular transformation, and it continues to grow. I am very encouraged that the University of Maryland, for example, put $500,000 of its own money into a curriculum transformation project and enhancement of women's studies to do this work. This is the first research institution or comprehensive university that has done this, certainly the first campus to put that amount of money into this effort.

I want to share several anecdotes. The curriculum transformation project at the University of Maryland began with the Greer Committee, the campus committee that developed the original proposal for the project. It was somewhat controversial on campus, partly because it was funded without going to the campus senate. Of course, if it had gone to the campus senate, it would not have come out with $500,000. The President, William Curwin, to whom I report, took the heat. He made that allocation. And because of that, there was a lot of backlash from the faculty. And, as you might imagine, several articles and an interesting illustration appeared in the campus newspaper capturing the ways in which they conceptualized the work we are doing.

It is gratifying to me to know, however, that during the search in which President Curwin was hired, three out of four of the candidates who came in from the outside were extremely knowledgeable and articulate about curriculum transformation. One person on the search committee, who had also been on the Greer Committee, asked all of the candidates about curriculum transformation. Every single candidate was prepared for the

question. Two had funded programs on their own campuses, and the third had actually been involved in a project.

Their responses were wonderfully supportive of us, and the people at Maryland began to feel that, yes, maybe if all of our peer institutions are doing this, we should be doing it too. This is a great strategy. That is why I am telling you about Maryland, so you can go home and tell them what Maryland has done. The work we are doing in our individual caucuses can be of general help as well. When we were debating about our non-sexist language policy on campus, for example, our vice president could point out that the American Psychological Association had been working on this issue for a long time, that it was not a problem unique to us, and that the APA had produced a document useful to us. The point is that even when we seem to be talking to ourselves, we are being heard. We are having an impact, and it is encouraging. But we also have to keep educating the leadership.

The other part of my topic is how we position ourselves for backlash. I have two responses to this, thinking institutionally and thinking inclusively, and both ideas have been touched on.

I think we have been lucky that the backlash has been hysterical and extreme, as campus newspaper articles about our project at Maryland reflect. When backlash is extreme, people can see that it is political. So when the opposition challenges *us* with being political, all we have to do is turn the debate around and show that we are being reasonable, that *they* are the ones creating lists telling us what to teach or not to teach in our courses--and we, in contrast, are trying to open up the curriculum.

Most of the strategies for "thinking institutionally" have already been mentioned, so I just want to emphasize that it is important for us to know our institutions well. We have to decide when to debate and when not to debate. We know, for instance, how people criticized Dukakis for not debating, for not talking back or going on the attack in his '88 presidential campaign. However, we also have an example from the University of Washington of what happens when an instructor chooses to debate a student and the debate gets national press attention. In that case, the student wound up on an Oprah Winfrey show talking about "male bashing."

On the other hand, it is sometimes better to fuel the debate. It is hard to know which direction to take, but if you choose to debate, you need to know in advance every argument to be used against you and be prepared with well thought-out responses. You will also have to prepare your administrators about what is going to happen and make sure they have a sophisticated understanding of the issues, of the complexity of the issues. It is wonderful to be able to supply appropriate words to the head of an institution, and it is important that people knowledgeable about the issues and well-versed in the language be in key positions to do so.

From time to time, however, we also have to go back into the spaces where we do talk only to each other so that the message does not get diluted, which is my next point: we have to deliver the message on our own terms. I admire Florence Howe, for example, for maintaining her press as the Feminist Press, even though it has meant that sometimes she lost grants and possible funding opportunities. But she kept that word in the title of the press, and I think that is important. We also have to build our message into the mission of the institution, and we have to help those in the institution think about the future. We have to see what their aspirations are. We have to see what the organization is aspiring to be and make sure that as the sentences articulating those goals are being formed, we provide language that informs them.

Finally, thinking inclusively. We all have work to do on this issue as well. In spite of the fact that we made an attempt to be inclusive on this panel, for example, it still falls to Leslie [an African American] to handle the topic, which she handled with a great deal of thoughtfulness. She knows the subject better than we do, but it is up to us to become as sophisticated and thoughtful about these issues as Leslie is. The whole dynamic of expertise and experience is also very important here: we can become experts, but we also have to make sure that we get the experiences we need to carry forward this inclusive agenda. Regrettably, there are more people who look like me in the institutions than there are those who look like Leslie. We who are white have to make sure that our agendas are inclusive because we have more people power in the positions to make a difference.

Another strategy for thinking inclusively is the power of the first example. Donna Shavlik, for instance, started her new book, *Educating the Majority*, with a chapter on diversity. That is the sort of thing we can do fairly easily. Rather than putting diversity last on the agenda, put it first.

Response and Discussion

Dorothy O. Helly:

Now we will let the panelists have a chance to exchange some general comments about the issues they have raised. If I may, I will first highlight the main points made.

The critical issues in transforming the knowledge base seem to be that, when talking about differences and sameness--or--equality, by virtue of what they mean, sameness and equality assume that there are differences. The issue for us as feminist scholars has been to redefine what we do with differences. That is what Sandy was talking about: differences that can be

experienced as inclusive, that is differences that can be held together rather than differences that are allowed to be divisive and polarized like "subordinate" and "superior."

Then there is the issue of whether the transformation of the knowledge base is indeed a revolution or a palace coup--a wonderful distinction right at the heart of what we are talking about--something we had better face up to because it deals with what Leslie discussed in terms of the power structure. Are we simply reshuffling ourselves within that power structure? Because if we are, without dealing with what that power structure is all about, it doesn't matter how many women study women's studies, there won't be any place for them to go within the academy. That also speaks to Sandy's point. Now, I turn it over to my co-panelists for more discussion.

Elizabeth Minnich:

I'm struck by two things. The first is the obvious, that we are talking about power in every one of these discussions. We are talking about the degree to which if we think about these things within what has been the dominant tradition, we are going to think ourselves into mistakes and hold ourselves in powerlessness. That's one.

Practically speaking, what is also striking is that we are saying two things. Because we are talking about "knowledge power," as Foucault has termed it, we are saying, first, that we have to continue to work to undo the center (politically, intellectually, emotionally, and in terms of identity constructions). We must work to undo the center because the center has been hegemonic--it is not just one place among others; it has been the defining center for our culture, and it is where the power is. Second, we are talking about working around the center at the same time that we are working to undo it.

So there are genuine alternatives and new alliances. Special studies now cross gender and race with class. We work with the new -isms, with professional activists, with professional politicians, with women's studies-in-transformation projects, with friends to keep our sanity because its dangerous and difficult, and with people who have power and budgets. Those are all alliances we build in order to keep building alternatives while we go after what's at the center. Clearly, one without the other would not last, which does not mean that everybody has to do everything.

The only other thing I want to add is that it drives me absolutely crazy that we keep confusing equality and sameness. And what that says is that the defining and power-wielding few have so made themselves the norm that everybody else--the majority--has to be the same in order to be equal. Equal has to do with being different. If you are the same, you don't have to be equal. Equal is precisely a provision external to the people involved that

allows ourselves to credit or discredit certain samenesses and differences for a particular purpose. It protects the freedom to be the same or different. It is a provision. Do not let people say you just want to be the same or aren't we becoming the same if we become equal. No. Equal means protecting difference.

Leslie Hill-Davidson:

One point I want to add is that while we battle, while we go through these struggles, while we do the transformation work, we do these things not simply in opposition. Perhaps we need to think more self-consciously, more intentionally, about creating new visions.

We work so much in opposition, we work so hard tearing down, that we don't often spend time thinking, OK, what's it going to look like on the other side? You can get people to say, yeah, yeah, I think you're right, that's bad language. But what's on the other side? I don't think we have a clear vision of that. We don't have to come up with an answer--I think of us as one of several generations that will be working on this--but clearly we can make more concrete what we think a future might look like.

Sandra Coyner:

Just one little comment. I like to think about the visual images we make of what we're doing. I'm struck by Elizabeth's image of the center and the periphery--that contrast--and I wonder why it is so different from my image, which is of this space woven by lines of tension. Part of the explanation may be that here on this panel, on this table, we are having to hold together different parts of the work that we do.

The image of center and periphery is essential if we are to understand how gender works. Yet I imagine that the work of creating a vision from a woman's viewpoint also has something to do with weaving things together and holding them in tension. And neither of those should be privileged. We must do all of that. We have been doing all sorts of excessive burdens for so many years, I have no doubt we'll be able to.

Dorothy O. Helly:

One additional topic for further discussion has to do with essentialism and how it relates to the problem of talking among ourselves. Please comment on the debate between essentialism *versus* social construction and/or empiricism.

Elizabeth Minnich:

Essentialism is...say you are explaining water. No, let's say "woman," that's easier. By talking about the *essence* of being "woman," we try to talk

about that which is timeless, unchangeable, living, eternal, but therefore also, of course, specific in some way. So the definition is liable to turn around and get exclusive--it's a potential trap that can be used to distinguish between "real" and "less real" women. That's the danger. On the other hand, if the definition is not held rigid and not used the way the hegemonic system uses it, talking about essence of "woman" can be inspirational, it can provide grounds for coalition. It allows leeway.

The point is not either-or. The point is that these ideas are being cast as either-or, in oppositional format publicly and in the academy. That is sloppy thinking. It's *not* either-or. Either-or is very crude thinking. There's absolutely nothing wrong with thinking about essences. What's wrong is using them politically to brand and divide people.

Sandra Coyner:

This semester I have been talking about feminist methodologies and have also been thinking about the debate between essentialism, social construction, and/or empiricism because a lot of the writing about feminist methodology attacks empiricist approaches. Yet when I look at some of the most important research breakthroughs of the last fifteen years, many of them use very simple approaches and, well, you know, "the master's tools." One that I think is important is Pauline Bart's study on stopping rape. It is a government-funded, massive-interview study, but she came up with important results just by asking the unheard-of question, "What about women who managed to avoid being raped?" Very standard method with new questions.

Sandra Harding's recent book on feminist methodology helps here because she suggests that we should look at the methodologies that have worked for us, find out what characterizes them, and call that feminist methodology instead of letting the prescriptive writings of people who say "this is what you have to do for your work to be feminist" define what is feminist. Harding validates feminist empiricism as something that is useful in many ways and many places. I don't think we can deny that we have accumulated a tremendous amount of knowledge from ordinary ways. She also likes to distinguish between method, methodology, and epistemology, suggesting that while we have feminist epistemologies and feminist methodologies, we use the same methods. Our tools and techniques for gathering information are, in fact, shared.

Leslie Hill-Davidson:

Just briefly, I don't disagree. There are tools that all of us are familiar with, that we have become familiar with through our training, and that will certainly be useful in transforming the knowledge base. Yet I think we have not been as effective as we could be. Even the term *feminist* has

been given so many different meanings it is almost lost to us as a tool for organizing, whether in the intellectual, academic community or outside of it. When I get in front of a class, for instance, and I ask students, "Are any of you feminists?" I tell you I can count on the fingers of one hand the numbers of them who say that they are, who identify as such.

There are tools that are useful, but we have to be self-conscious about how we use them and be clear that we are using them for transformation. When I get in front of a class of students, for example, I tell them, I am going to talk to you about a certain subject and I am going to do it from my own perspective. I do not tell them I am going to be objective; I am not objective here: I am anti-hierarchal. We can start with that and be very purposeful and explicit about why we use the tools we do; and at the same time, we can be creating other tools for use in this whole process.

I think we have not been self-conscious enough. We have not acknowledged the political purposes for which we are using these tools. And I think we ought to because those in opposition are certainly becoming less uncomfortable with being explicit about how they use their tools. I have no problem with doing the same thing.

Betty Schmitz:

I agree. It's a both/and. Use the tools when we need them to make the arguments, but make sure we also control the terms of the debate. I think of Carol Jacklin and the way she used traditional tools for her research on sex difference. She's done it better than they have, but she didn't find the differences they do. She got published, but a lot of studies like hers, that do not find expected results, never get published.

Elizabeth Minnich:

It strikes me that what we are trying to do is to "de-fetishize" the tools. Then we can use them. We are also looking for ways to say to others what we mean in this talk we have been doing among ourselves. We need to find ways to convey the concepts behind terms like "same and different," "minimalist and essentialist." Maybe we should start some kind of a round-robin publication of good lines that we've used, whether with students or with reporters doing interviews. Wouldn't that be useful? Usually I get into terrible trouble with reporters because I try to qualify everything, but today I seem to be being more of a rhetorician than a philosopher, and so I will offer two suggestions.

Here's the response to those who ask something like, are women really the same as men or are they different? The problem with talking about sameness and difference between women and men is that it presumes a category of "human" informing the discussion. I think we could argue that

because men (a particular group of men, by no means all men in the same way) have occupied the category "human," everybody else ends up trying to be the same as that one little group of men and ends up being "less than." So, one of the things we're trying to undo is the conflation of "human" with a particular group of men. That is behind our trouble in talking about this in a whole lot of ways. Once we've worked with the category "human" for a while, we may find out that it's absolutely empty because what it contains are these few men's notions, and there isn't anything there for most of us.

Another quick approach is simply to say, which language are we speaking? Because another one of our problems is that people are trying always to speak only one language at a time. So you can say, politically speaking, sometimes all women are the same because we have to make a coalition, because we've all got some problems in common. That's got nothing to do with whether we're economically the same. That's got nothing to do with whether we're the same with regard to positions of power. Some of us have much more power than others.

Those are two obvious things I know to do. One is to proliferate the discussion by always defining "with regard to what": "same" with regard to what; "different" with regard to what. Tell me your language, and then we can talk about it. The other is to try to go after what's at the center that makes all these conversations possible. They never say, well, isn't it interesting that men are just like women; they always say, then women are just like men. That's the point: we are all trying to be the same as "those" people. The problem occurs with race, class, and ethnicity, too, because we are assuming white. But I will stop there. I'm especially not good with reporters because I always try to complicate it.

Dorothy O. Helly:

This brings us back to where we started. Are we talking to ourselves? If reporters are not informed by current theory, if they are still asking the same questions they asked twenty years ago, for instance about biology or culture and nature or nurture, then how far have we come? Are the students who are going to be the newspaper reporters of tomorrow going to be equally unprepared to deal with these issues because they haven't discussed them anywhere in the curriculum? Or are we making progress in the transformation of the knowledge base?

We have not solved any problems here today, but we have indeed raised a lot of interesting questions. Thank you for helping us to think clearly and for challenging us with new questions for clear thinking.

The National Council for Research on Women

The National Council for Research on Women is a coalition of over sixty centers and organizations that support and conduct feminist research, policy analysis, and educational programs. Formed in 1981 as a working alliance to bridge traditional distinctions among scholarship, policy, and action programs, the Council also works to strengthen ties with other national and international organizations and coalitions. Through its member centers, affiliates, and sponsored projects like the National Network of Women's Caucuses, the Council links over 10,000 women and men scholars and practitioners in this country and abroad and serves constituencies that include the academic community, public policy makers, and the general public. Other projects include:

Work-in-Progress Database, an online database funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts being developed in collaboration with the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College and the Research Libraries Group;

Beyond Parent Tracks: Alliances for the '90s, a two-year national seminar series bringing together corporate practitioners, researchers, and policy makers around a broad range of work and family issues. Sponsors include Aetna Life & Casualty Company; American Express Company; Chevron U.S.A. Inc.; Equitable Financial Companies; Metropolitan Life Insurance Company; Philip Morris Companies Inc.; the Women's Bureau, Department of Labor, Region II; and Xerox Corporation.

Mainstreaming Minority Women's Studies, a Ford Foundation-sponsored project involving 13 Council member center and affiliated programs that integrate minority women's studies into existing liberal arts curricula; and

International exchange programs that include the US/USSR Women's Dialogue and Ford-sponsored India and Bangladesh Visiting Scholars programs.

Council Publications

A Council Directory series that includes the ***A Women's Mailing List Directory***, a "list of lists" of national and regional women's organizations and networks around the country; the ***Directory of International Research Centers***, compiled from the Council's international database, listing 148 research and documentation centers in 47 countries as well as Council member centers in the US; the forthcoming ***Directory of National Women's Organizations***, funded by Sears, Roebuck, and Company, updating the edition Sears and Allstate Insurance Company published in the mid-eighties; and the forthcoming ***Directory of Women's Media***, a listing of over 700 periodicals, presses, publishers and other media and individuals published annually from 1975-1989 by the Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press.

Women's Research Network News, the Council's quarterly newsletter that includes News from Member Centers; News from the Caucuses; Publications and Resources; Upcoming Events; Job Opportunities; and Opportunities for Research, Study, and Affiliation as well as other news of interest to the women's research, policy, and funding communities.

Mainstreaming Minority Women's Studies, a summary of the Council's Ford Foundation-sponsored mainstreaming projects at 13 Council member centers and affiliates, with an introduction by Leslie Hill-Davidson (New York: National Council for Research on Women, 1990). Projects describe a variety of approaches that include involving minority scholars and racial-ethnic studies programs in planning and implementation of transformed curricula. Emphases are on new theoretical understandings of diversity, innovative pedagogy and alternative approaches to learning.

A Women's Thesaurus: An Index of Language Used to Describe and Locate Information About Women. Mary Ellen S. Capek, Editor (New York: Harper & Row, 1987, paperback edition, 1989). Over 5,000 terms that describe research, programs, and policies affecting women's lives in communications; economics and employment; education; history and social change; international women; language, literature, religion, and philosophy; law, government, and public policy; natural science and health; science and technology; social science and culture; and visual and performing arts. Terms are organized alphabetically, with cross references to broader terms, narrower terms, related terms and synonyms. Main term entries also list "do not use" terms and suggest preferred usage. Cited by ***Library Journal*** as one of fifteen best reference books in 1987.

Women in Academe: Progress and Prospects, a report of the Women in Higher Education Task Force. Mariam Chamberlain, Editor (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1989). A four-year study carried out by a Task Force of fifteen leading scholars and educators, the report examines progress women have made in higher education over the last two decades. Providing a comprehensive overview of the status and prospects of women toward the end of the 1980s and beyond, the book traces the increasing presence of minority and returning women, the movement of women into non-traditional careers, and the institutionalization of women's studies programs, campus women's centers and research institutes. Also includes chapters on the status of women as faculty members, administrators, and trustees.

Opportunities for Research and Study, a descriptive listing of the fellowships, affiliated scholar programs, grants and internships sponsored by the member centers of the National Council for Research on Women. Compiled by Paulette Tulloch (New York: National Council for Research on Women, 1989). A resource for graduate students, academic advisors, women's centers and research institutes, scholars, and independent researchers.

A Declining Federal Commitment to Research About Women, 1980-1984, a report from the Commission on New Funding Priorities. Prepared by Mary Rubin (New York: National Council for Research on Women, 1985). A compilation of post-1980 data documenting a precipitous reduction in federal money spent on research for women and the trend toward subsuming research on women into other areas. Documenting individual agency funding patterns, the report covers the Departments of Education, Justice, Defense and Labor; the National Institutes of Mental Health and of Aging; the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Science Foundation.

Third World Women in Agriculture: An Annotated Bibliography. Prepared by Shelly Kessler (New York: National Council for Research on Women, 1985). A compilation and critical review of basic and widely scattered literature and documentary material on Third World women in agriculture.

Women in Development: Theory and Practice, papers and proceedings of a conference on March 23, 1983 (New York: National Council for Research on Women, 1983). Addresses by Florence Howe, Hanna Papanek and Nadia Youssef, reports of several workshops, and a list of participants.

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The National Council for Research on Women
The Sara Delano Roosevelt Memorial House
47-49 East 65th Street
New York, NY 10021
212/570-5001

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